

Story of the Cahill Iron Works; Only Bathtub Factory in South Was Outgrowth of Old Webster Foundry—Used to Have Man With Water Barrel on Roof to Put Out Fires—Now Building Eighteen-

[This is the fourth of a series of articles. The News will carry from time to time about the founding and growth of those industries that today make the city such a commanding one in southern commerce.]

It is a far cry from a foundry which has a man with a water barrel on its roof to put out fires whenever "blasts" so one that is today building an eighteen-acre plant in Alton Park to take care of its ever-growing business, but this is the history of the Cahill Iron Works.

Connected with the concern are two men who have had a great part in its development through many years to its present stable position—Frank H. Caldwell and J. J. Mahoney. Mr. Caldwell is president of the concern and Mr. Mahoney general manager. The latter came to Chattanooga an invalid, expecting to live but a few months, and in search of an agreeable climate in which to do that. He found it—no agreeable that he recovered strength, renewed his interest in industry, and had a great part in the building of the Cahill plant.

Tremendous Growth.
When Mr. Caldwell acquired control of the plant, in 1883, its annual output was but \$55,000. Today the figures amount to a round million dollars, and with the new plant in operation it is expected to increase this last figure several times. The weekly payroll in 1920 was between \$500 and \$600, and it is between \$5,000 and \$6,000.

In the early days of the concern it made marbledized machinery and types of house fixtures. Today it specializes practically exclusively on bath-tubs, washstands and similar equipment. The Cahill management saw the coming of the light when building fixtures wanted and turned its energies to other and coming lines of manufacture. As a result today it is the only bathtub, lavatory and washstand factory south of the Ohio river.

Second Oldest in City.
In point of time the subject of this article is the oldest concern in Chattanooga, being antedated only a year by the Wheeland company, the story of which was the first of this series of articles. But the factory that J. T. Cahill started in a modest way in 1872 might really be called a descendant to Webster's Foundry and Machine Works, which had gone out of business just a short while previously. The Webster plant, which probably is little known to Chattanooga even in memory, was a most extensive foundry, machine shop and boiler works, which could turn out anything from a window sash to a complete locomotive.

Its founder, Thomas Webster, was a grandfather of Webster James. In telling the story of the Cahill plant Mr. Caldwell, its president, gives a most interesting account of the Webster plant.
"Thomas Webster was an Englishman by birth and one of the very best machinists this section ever saw," Mr. Caldwell said. "I knew Mr. Webster very well, and he told me much of his history, both personal and in a business way. He always took more pride in anything the Cahill Iron Works did, as so many of our early workmen were his old apprentices."
"Several years prior to the Civil war Mr. Webster came to this country and went to work for the Baldwin Locomotive Works of Philadelphia. When the Nashville & Chattanooga railroad was being built, they bought a locomotive from the Baldwin company and Mr. Webster was delegated to take the engine to Nashville. He said they had to load the engine on wagons (having, of course, taken it to pieces and boxed many of the parts), and haul it over

mountain roads to Pittsburgh, where it was loaded on a steamboat and brought down the Ohio and up the Cumberland to Nashville. He put the engine together in the railroad shops and was offered the position of master mechanic, in charge of all machinery, by the railroad officials. He accepted and remained in this position several years, when he decided to go into business for himself, and selected Chattanooga as the best location. He formed a partnership with a Mr. Mitchell, a fine business man, who was the father of W. B. Mitchell, banker and capitalist, who died a few years ago on Look-out mountain. W. B. Mitchell told me of his working as a boy in the pattern shop of Webster & Mitchell. When the federal army captured Chattanooga the works were abandoned, and both Mr. Webster and Mr. Mitchell went further south.

"After the war Mr. Webster returned to Chattanooga and started the works that in a few years became famous as Webster's Foundry and Machine Works. Mr. Mitchell went back to his original home in Sequatchie valley and did not go on with the business.

"Webster's works made machinery that not a factory in the south, if in the whole country, think of making. It was before the day of the specialist, and they made anything from a shaver or a stationary engine up to a locomotive. Two or three locomotive engines were made outright in these works. They would make a contract to make every bit of machinery for a blast furnace, steamboat or anything else that came along. The works were located where the Southern railway freight depot now stands. Part of the freight depot, I think, was built on the site of the old Webster machine shop.

"About 1873 and 1874 the Webster works were in full blast. They had a large boiler shop, the superintendent of which was Mr. Giescom, grandfather of Mr. Harry Giescom, president of the Chattanooga Manufacturers' association, and himself a very prominent young iron manufacturer. The superintendent of the foundry was a Mr. Frank Cole, while a Mr. Brown (many of whose descendants still live here), was superintendent of the large machine shop. The superintendent of the pattern shop was a Mr. Priest, father of Sam Priest, an extra fine pattern-maker himself and now working for the old Chattanooga Furnace company, they having built everything for them, including a locomotive which the furnace used as a switch engine.

Cahill & Mahoney.
"Along in 1875 and 1876 two young men were working in the Webster shops who were destined to play an important part in the history of manufacturing in Chattanooga—one of them a moulder, J. T. Cahill, and the other a machinist, John J. Mahoney, so long identified with the Cahill Iron Works, whom you may see everywhere in Chattanooga knows and I might say further, loves and admires. Later in 1874 or early in 1875 the Webster works went out of business. It may be that Mr. Webster realized that the day of the specialist had already arrived, or that it soon would arrive, and that a man who built boilers should make nothing else. I might add here that Mr. Webster lived a long time afterward and was prominently connected with the Victoria Coal and Iron company, an English company which operated in the Sequatchie valley, having built several blast furnaces and which finally sold out to the Tennessee Coal and Iron company. He thought a great deal of his boys," as he called his old apprentices, and requested that his pallbearers be selected from them. John J. Mahoney, Sam Priest and John G. Murphy were pallbearers.

"Jack" Cahill was familiarly called, bought a number of the old

Webster patterns such as hollowware, wash weights and patterns for architectural work, columns, balustrades, etc., and started in for himself. Broad street at that time was called Railroad avenue and had a double track down the center, used almost entirely for storing empty cars. There was a large building, built between seventh and eighth streets, occupying most of that block, including where Giescom's furniture store now is. The first operating the planing mill was McCardle & Dunning. Just north of where the James building now stands Cahill rented a frame building about 6x25 feet, and got his power from the planing mill. Mr. Wheeland tells how his works first went under the name of the "Etna Foundry." Mr. Cahill called his new enterprise the "Cahill Iron Works" and operated under that name for a few years. I don't think he had more than a dozen employees and he did a great deal of the work himself.

Barrel on the Roof.
"The building had a flat roof, and when the rain was put on Cahill had a man to stay on the roof, where he had a number of barrels filled with water put out with a bucket of water put out after the rain began to fly around. Cahill did business at this location for about three years, and then bought from Col. A. W. Mitchell son 100 feet at the corner of Boyce and Hooker streets, the names of these streets having been changed in recent years to Chestnut and Thirteenth streets, respectively. It was then he changed the name of his factory to the "Cahill Iron and Brass Works." Later he bought an additional building, which ran through to the railroad. On these lots he erected frame buildings and built up a very successful business.

"Marbledized iron mantels were very popular at that time, and Cahill distinguished himself in making them successfully. The marbler was a Scotchman named McKennie, and he was quite an artist. In many of the mantels he painted local scenery, views from Lookout mountain, Unicoiella rock, etc. Many of the old houses in the city have marbledized mantels with hand-painted scenery. Phillips & Buttrif in Nashville and Cahill in Chattanooga were the only concerns in the south that ever made marbledized iron mantels.

"About 1883 Mr. Cahill wanted some one on whom he could rely to help manage the business, and he induced John J. Mahoney to accept the position. Just before the Webster works went out of business Mr. Mahoney went to Philadelphia and on account of his knowledge of machinery got a position in a woolen cloth factory to look after all their machinery. He was promoted from time to time, and held an important position for so young a man when the factory burned down. Then, on account of his knowledge of the carpet business, he got a good position with a large wholesale house in Philadelphia who handled carpets, etc. It was when he went to work for Cahill he returned to Chattanooga that I became acquainted with him.

"Previous to that time I was local cashier of the Western & Atlantic railroad from 1872 to 1883. John C. Anderson, whom all old citizens remember, was also with the Western & Atlantic railroad. In 1883 he and I branched out for ourselves, and built a hardware factory, and made ax, pick and hammer handles of hickory wood, a firm being Anderson & Caldwell. We owned the ground on which the Chattanooga Lumber company planing mills are located, and some of the buildings this company is now using were parts of the old hardware factory. The hardware business did not turn out to be a "howling success," but during the boom of 1886 we sold out to advantage, "sadder but wiser" men from our hardware factory experience.

"In the meantime Mr. Mahoney and I had gotten to be very good friends, and being anxious to engage in some manufacturing line, I asked him if he thought Mr. Cahill would like to have a partner. He replied that Mr. Cahill was doing very well indeed, and he was satisfied he would not, but fate or circumstance would have it that he was sick and remained in bad health for some time. Mr. Mahoney got in communication with me, and arranged a conference with Mr. Cahill. He offered to sell me the business, including everything but land and buildings for about \$20,000. I could have handled the matter alone, but being unfamiliar with the business, I was afraid of it. After many conferences we decided to form a stock company, and the Cahill Iron Works was organized with three stockholders, Mr. Cahill retaining one-third, and Frank Whiteside, of the Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis railroad, and myself taking a third each. Mr. Mahoney had agreed to stay with me and run the factory, while I was the office manager. Mr. Garnett, Andrew was our lawyer, drew up the charter, and organized the company, the name selected being the "Cahill Iron Works." The first organization consisted of J. T. Cahill, president; Frank Whiteside, vice-president; F. J. Caldwell, secretary and treasurer; J. J. Mahoney, general manager. Col. Andrews for a number of years was on the board of directors, but was not a stockholder. It was in June, 1887, that the new company took charge.

"Mr. Cahill left for California and stayed a year. The last year Cahill ran the business they had around forty or fifty employees and the total sales were \$55,000. The payroll ran from \$400 to \$500 per week.
"Our first year was very profitable, extremely so for those times. There was a building boom going on almost everywhere. Fort Payne, Middleboro, Sheffield, Bridgeport, Harriman, and many other towns bought all kinds of building castings, marbledized mantels, etc. The first year we had a great deal of railroad work, making brass and iron castings, also brake shoes for the Cincinnati Southern, Alabama Great Southern and New Orleans & North Eastern railroads. At the end of the year the Ross-Meehan foundries built their factory, and they got the contract for all this railroad work.

"After the first year Mr. Mahoney came in as a stockholder, and has been prominently identified with the company ever since. We more than doubled our output the first year, and if there had been an excess profits tax, the government would have gotten nearly all of it. They could not have built up the business as we have succeeded in doing. For several years we had a fine business, and when we did not do so well as we did the first year, we had what was considered a very successful business until panic of 1893. Then for several years we were on the other side, and year after year we lost money. It was well we saved our profits, and kept them in the business, as they were badly needed to tide us over the lean years that followed. Business was particularly dull, I think, in 1894 or 1895.

Hard Times.
"During these years, with a reduced force, we averaged hardly over half time, and our total sales for the year were only \$40,000. The men could not get work elsewhere, and would hang around waiting. We generally worked from two weeks and shut down two weeks. Pig iron that now sells for around \$42, and has been as high the last year or so as \$50 per ton, and bought in Birmingham at \$5.50 per ton, and the furnace was glad to take our notes payable in four months' time. When the notes were taken up we found that the furnace had sent many of them to Canada to be discounted. Run of the mines coal we bought for 50 cents to \$1 per ton delivered. We found this low-priced material to be the very hardest to pay for of any material we have ever had to buy since. Deliver all of them from an extreme "low-price" anything. Many manufacturers hired common labor at 15 cents per day, but \$1 per day was as low as we were paid. "I am a little ahead of matters just as they came along. Soon after Mr. Cahill returned from California he died. John A. Hart, president, and W. E. Baskett, cashier of the Third National bank, and M. J. O'Brien, bought the Cahill stock. They soon after gave an option on the stock to Frank M. Walker. I had previously bought out some stock Mr. Walker closed a trade for the Cahill stock, and took part of himself. The balance was procured among the other stockholders. Mr. Walker sold his interest in the hardware firm, and took an active interest in the business as secretary of the company. Soon after the hard times previously referred to came along, and we were having "hard sledding." Mr. Walker stayed with the company for some time, and went to New York as agent for a tile factory. He made good and is now president of the New Jersey Tile company, of Trenton, N. J. He has many friends

in Chattanooga, who will be glad to know this. He is a brother of L. G. Walker, of the Times.
"To get back to the factory, soon after Mr. Walker came into the business marbledized iron mantels went out of date and wood mantels took their place. We put in an electro-plating plant and made fine plated brasses to go with wood mantels. We also had a retail grating and mantle store located in the Adams block, corner East Eighth street and Georgia avenue, where we had our office. The panic of 1893 sent us back to the factory to save expenses. It was not until after the Spanish-American war that we again had anything like prosperous times. I remember a remark John A. Hart, then president of the Third National bank, made to me. He said: "If any man in any line of manufacturing will stick to his business for ten years, he will see times change so that his business will be prosperous and he can make money. There was nothing else to do, and we stuck to it."

Had Many Fires.
"In the meantime the old frame buildings we occupied were veritable shells. Mr. Walker left the real estate to four different heirs with a proviso that the rents should go to his father and mother for life. To give an idea of how the old place looked, our principal competitor in plated grates was the Peeries Manufacturing company, of Louisville. The manager, a Mr. Fitch, was in Chattanooga, and called on us. I invited him to go out in the foundry. He said he would prefer not, "the d—d thing might fall down on me." Talk about fires! We were having Cahill's early experience over again, always catching on fire, but, luckily, always putting the fire out. We must have made some reputation in that line, because the chief of the Chattanooga fire department at that time whenever visiting us, would come to town, in order to "show off" his department would turn in an alarm, and the fire department would come. He would have to say something to the newspaper, and there would be a "big blaze at Cahill's foundry." We finally persuaded him now and then to come in, and he would tell me if he did not, he would either get our rate increased, or else get our insurance policy cancelled. However, it was only after we had been doing business over a year in new brick buildings that we had a fire then and collected about \$18,000 insurance. Up to that time no fire had ever been serious enough for us to make a claim, but we sure had made some reputation for "always being on fire."

Got In Bathtub Game.
"After the Spanish-American war we had a very prosperous year, and bought the real estate owned by the Cahill heirs, and 150 feet additional frontage from Mrs. Helen Cahill, 30 feet on the opposite side of the street. We tore down the old frame buildings one at a time, and replaced with brick buildings, until not one of the old buildings was left standing. We had built up quite a large business on the planing mill, and sold in many of the large cities north, south and west. In 1900-1901 we thought we saw an opportunity to extend our business by going into the manufacture of plumbers' supplies such as bathtubs, lavatories, sinks and plumbers' sanitary ware.

"The business of enameling was a secret process, and we had it all to work on as best we could. There was no place then, and there is none now, where you can buy machinery that is made in the south, and every business man has been told that we are the only people who ever made enameled ware who did not lose from \$100,000 to \$200,000 or \$300,000 before they ever made anything. For that reason we are now building new works on an eighteen and a half acre tract in Alton Park. We are now working about \$500,000. The weekly payroll runs between \$5,500 and \$6,000, not including officers and clerks, and the yearly output of our manufactured goods is now around \$1,000,000. When the new plant is in operation these figures should be increased several times.

Building New Plant.
"At this time and for several years past we have realized our shortcomings, and that in order to manufacture economically and get out quantity production with modern up-to-date machinery, we would have to make extensions. Building as we did one building a time there was no method; the floor was built on the ground, and on the same level, and it is impossible to install machinery to increase our output. For that reason we are now building new works on an eighteen and a half acre tract in Alton Park. We are now working about \$500,000. The weekly payroll runs between \$5,500 and \$6,000, not including officers and clerks, and the yearly output of our manufactured goods is now around \$1,000,000. When the new plant is in operation these figures should be increased several times.

"I ought not to close without giving credit to the "young blood" that has come into the business—Hugh W. Powell, secretary; W. T. Mahoney, assistant general manager, and Hollis M. Caldwell, treasurer. All these young men for a number of years have worked hard, and the company owes much of its success to them, as well as to many faithful workers who are not stockholders or officers, among whom might mention John Zipp and J. S. Sprinkle, who have been heads of departments for over twenty years."

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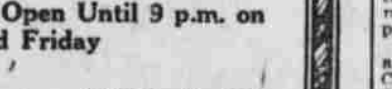
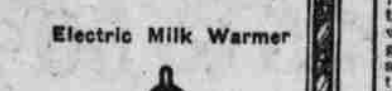
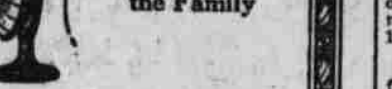
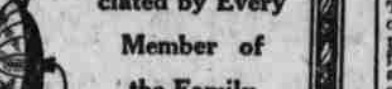
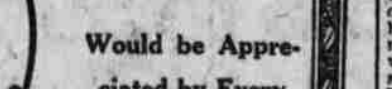


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